

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LUANDA 01086 01 OF 02 081841Z

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ACTION AF-06

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3940

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

CINCLANT NORFOLK VA

CINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LUANDA 1086

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS MILI PFORHA

SUBJECT: MILITARY SITUATION IN ANGOLA

1. SUMMARY. FNLA IS POISED ABOVE LUANDA PREPARING EITHER TO STRIKE INTO THE CITY OR SURROUND IT. MPLA HAS WON CONTROL OF A NUMBER OF CITIES IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL ANGOLA. UNITA IS TRYING TO CARVE OUT A TERRITORIAL BASE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF ATTENTION AT THE MOMENT IS CAXITO, A TOWN SOME 60 KILOMETERS NORTH OF LUANDA. FNLA IS SITTING IN THE TOWN WITH ABOUT 500 TROOPS; MPLA HAS PREPARED DEFENSIVE POSITIONS A SHORT DISTANCE TO THE SOUTH. THEY HAVE BLOWN A BRIDGE OVER THE DANDE RIVER AT PORTO QUIPIRE, A FEW KILOMETERS SOUTHWEST OF CAXITO AND HAVE MINED THE UNPAVED ROAD LEADING SOUTH FROM BARRA DO DANDE AND AN UNIMPROVED ROAD THAT BEGINS EAST OF CAXITO AND HEADS DUE SOUTH FOR A FEW KILOMETERS BEFORE TURNING WEST TO MEET THE LUANDA-CAXITO ROAD. MPLA HAS SET UP A DEFENSIVE PERIMETER ON THE SEMI-CIRCLE FORMED BY
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PAGE 02 LUANDA 01086 01 OF 02 081841Z

THIS ROAD AND THE BARRA DO DANDE ROAD. THE MPLA'S SECOND

LINE OF DEFENSE IS AT QUIFANGONDO, JUST NORTH OF CACUACO. A BRIDGE OVER THE BENGE RIVER AT QUIFANGONDO CAN BE EASILY BLOWN AND THE SURROUNDING LAND IS VERY MARSHY, OFFERING GOOD PROTECTION TO THE MPLA. HIGH GROUND SOUTH OF THE RIVER GIVES THE MPLA GOOD POSITION. MPLA HAS THREE BASES ON A ROAD RUNNING FROM QUIFANGONDO TO THE CATETE HIGHWAY. IN ADDITION, MPLA HAS TROOPS EAST OF CAXITO ON THE CAXITO-CARMONA HIGHWAY. THE PRINCIPAL BASE IN THAT REGION IS AT PIRI.

3. SOME TALK HAS BEEN HEARD OF AN MPLA ENCIRCLING MOVEMENT WESTWARD ALONG THIS ROAD TO CAXITO TO CUT OFF THE FNLA FORCES. ONE SOURCE TOLD ME THAT LARGE FORCES ARE NOT NEEDED TO DEFEND AGAINST FNLA TROOPS COMING FROM CARMONA BECAUSE THE BRIDGE OVER DANGE RIVER IS EASILY DEFENDED. THE COMMANDO COMMANDER HERE GAVE ME THE OPPOSITE VIEW, THAT IS, THAT THE DEFENSES AT THE BRIDGE CAN BE OVERCOME WITH RELATIVE EASE BY FNLA BECAUSE THE HIGH GROUND IS ON ITS SIDE. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THE MPLA BASE AT PIRI WEST OF THE BRIDGE IS SO STRONGLY MANNED THAT FNLA CANNOT OVERCOME IT. HE FURTHER MAINTAINS THAT FNLA WILL NOT MOVE TOWARD LUANDA UNTIL IT HAS SECURED THE CARMONA-CAXITO ROAD. TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD LEAVE THE FNLA OPEN TO A FLANK ATTACK THAT WOULD SEVER ITS SUPPORT LINES FROM THE NORTH. THE MPLA CLAIMS IT ALREADY HAS FNLA SURROUNDED AT CAXITO. EVEN IF TRUE, THE ENCIRCLEMENT OF CAXITO MEANS LITTLE, AS THE FRONT IS VERY NARROW AND THE MAIN BODY OF THE FNLA FORCES LIE SOME DISTANCE ABOVE THE TOWN.

4. FNLA INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO LUANDA ARE NOT KNOWN. THE FNLA SECRETARY OF TRADE AND COMMERCE, GRACA TAVARES, TOLD ME A FEW DAYS AGO THAT THE FNLA PLAN IS TO SURROUND THE CITY, LAY SIEGE TO IT AND FORCE IT INTO SUBMISSION OVER TIME. FNLA WILL NOT ENTER THE TOWN BECAUSE IT KNOWS IT WOULD FACE FEROCIOUS OPPOSITION FROM MPLA IRREGULARS IN THE SLUMS, NOR WILL IT CUT OFF WATER OR POWER, BECAUSE THAT WOULD TURN THE POPULACE AGAINST THE FNLA. THE GOAL WOULD NOT BE STARVATION, MERELY ISOLATION. WHATEVER THE TRUTH ABOUT FNLA INTENTIONS FOR LUANDA, FNLA STRATEGY IS TO TRY AND DRIVE FORWARD AT SEVERAL POINTS: CAXITO, THE CARMONA-CAXITO HIGHWAY AND THE MALANGE-SALAZAR-DONDO ROAD. AT THE MOMENT THEY ARE DOING POORLY IN THE LAST NAMED AREA. THROUGHOUT THE REGION UNDER ITS CONTROL FNLA HAS A DIFFICULT LOGISTICS PROBLEM, AS THE MPLA HAS CUT ITS

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LUANDA 01086 01 OF 02 081841Z

ACCESS TO THE PRINCIPLE AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL CENTERS OF THE COUNTRY. THE ONLY INDICATOR I HAVE OF THE FNLA ARMS SITUATION IS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL THE TROOPS IN THE CARMONA AREA CARRY MAUSERS, WHICH WOULD LEAD ONE TO CONCLUDE THAT AUTOMATIC WEAPONS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY AND HAVE ALL BEEN SENT TO THE BATTLE AREAS. THE PORTUGUESE CLAIM NOT TO HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY TROOPS FNLA HAS ABOVE CAXITO.

5. IN LUANDA, THE FNLA HAS GIVEN UP ITS GARRISON BEHIND THE CUCA BREWERY (CAZANGA) BUT STILL HOLDS OUT AT THE SAN PEDRA DA BARRA FORTRESS NORTH OF THE CITY. VISITORS COME AND GO TO THE FORT AND FOOD AND ARMS ARE BROUGHT IN AT NIGHT BY SEA AND BY LAND. THE COMMANDER IN THE FORT IS SAID TO BE A WHITE FORMER OFFICER OF THE OPVDCA (MILITIA). IF MPLA WERE TO SHUT OFF THE WATER OR BLOCK RESUPPLY EFFORTS, THE FNLA COULD SEVERALY DAMAGE THE REFINERY AND OTHER NEARBY INSTALLATIONS.

6. FNLA SEEMS TO HAVE ONLY TWO CHOICES AT CAXITO, EITHER TO TRY AND BREAK COMPLETELY THROUGH TO LUANDA, OR TO GO AS FAR AS QUIFANGONDO, IF THEY CAN, AND THEN MAKE A FLANKING MOVEMENT ALONG THE ROAD TO THE CATETE HIGHWAY AND THENCE TO THE ROAD SOUTH FROM LUANDA, THUS BOTTLING UP THE MPLA AND LAYING SIEGE TO THE CITY. IF FNLA HAD SUFFICIENT FORCES IT COULD STOP MPLA THRUSTS FROM THE CITY OR TOWARD IT. MEANWHILE, POWER AND WATER COULD BE CUT, FOOD SUPPLIES DENIED AND A STRATEGY OF WAITING ADOPTED. THE CITY COULD STILL BE SUPPLIED BY SEA, BUT THIS WOULD BE AN UNSATISFACTORY EXPEDIENT AND WITHOUT WATER OR POWER THE SITUATION WOULD SHORTLY BECOME INTOLERABLE. IF THE FNLA HAD THE STRENGTH AND CHOSE TO MOVE INTO THE CITY, MPLA IRREGULARS COULD BE EXPECTED TO FIGHT ALONG SIDE THE TROOPS. THE BATTLE WOULD BE PROLONGED AND THE CITY WOULD BECOME UNLIVABLE.

7. IF THE MPLA PERCEIVES THAT FNLA IS BUILDING ITS FORCES BEYOND CAXITO TO AN UNACCEPTABLE LEVEL, IT COULD IMMEDIATELY LAUNCH AN ATTACK TO PREVENT FURTHER RESUPPLY OF THE FNLA FORCES AND DRIVE THEM BACK TOWARD THE NORTH TO GIVE THEMSELVES MORE OF A CUSHION. MPLA MIGHT ALSO THRUST AT SEVERAL POINTS - TOWARD CARMONA ON THE CAXITO ROAD, FOR EXAMPLE AND NORTHWARD FROM LUCALA, IN ORDER TO HINDER THE MARSHALLING BY FNLA OF AN OVERWHELMING FORCE AT CAXITO. FIGHTING WAS REPORTED AT LUCALA JUST A FEW DAYS
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PAGE 04 LUANDA 01086 01 OF 02 081841Z

AGO AS BOTH SIDES FOUGHT FOR CONTROL OF THIS KEY JUNCTION.

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PAGE 01 LUANDA 01086 02 OF 02 090855Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LUANDA 1086

8. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF FIGHTING IN THE EASTERN AND CENTRAL REGIONS THE SITUATION LOOKS AS FOLLOWS. BENGUELA HAS BEEN TAKEN BY MPLA, AS HAS THE AREA TO THE SOUTH AROUND BAIA FARTA. NOVO REDONDE, PORTO AMBOIN AND GABELA ARE IN MPLA HANDS. ALL THREE MOVEMENTS ARE STILL IN LOBITO AFTER SOME FIGHTING, BUT THE ISSUE THERE IS STILL IN DOUBT AND MPLA IS SAID TO BE GEARING UP FOR ANOTHER OFFENSIVE. MPLA HAS HENRIQUE DE CARVALHO IN THE EAST, MALANGE AND DALANTANDO (SALAZAR). MPLA VIRTUALLY CONTROLS THE ENTIRE DISTRICT OF LUANDA IN THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF ANGOLA. AT MALANGE THE FNLA FORCE OF 600 MEN PUT ITSELF UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE PORTUGUESE ON AUGUST 3. THAT NIGHT THEY BROKE THROUGH AN MPLA CORDON AROUND THE TOWN AND HEADED NORTH. FNLA RETAINS THE NORTHERN PART OF ANGOLA, BEAT MPLA AT QUIBALA ON THE DONDO-NOVO LISBOA ROAD AND IS REPORTED TO BE FIGHTING MPLA IN LUCALA AT THE JUNCTION OF THE ROAD THAT LEADS NORTH TO CARMONA BETWEEN DALANTANDO AND MALANGE. FNLA ALSO JOINTLY CONTROLS SOME CITIES WITH UNITA. UNITA AND FNLA HAVE SILVA PORTO AND SERPA PINTO. THE FNLA FORCES OF DANIEL CHIPENDA MARCHED INTO SERPA PINTO FROM THE SOUTHEAST. UNITA AND MPLA ARE STILL IN LUSO AND ALL THREE MOVEMENTS HAVE A CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LUANDA 01086 02 OF 02 090855Z

PRESENCE IN NOVA LISBOA. THE PORTUGUESE ARMY COMMANDER IN NOVA LISBOA REPORTED ON AUGUST 7 THAT THE CITY IS VERY TENSE AND THAT IF VIOLENCE ERUPTS WITH 20,000 TO 25,000 REFUGEES IN AND AROUND THE TOWN THERE WILL BE A PANIC OF MASSIVE PROPORTIONS.

9. FNLA HAS A WELL-DEFINED TERRITORY BUT THE BOUNDARY WITH MPLA TERRAIN SHIFTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE EAST, AND IT IS TOO SOON TO DRAW DEFINITIVE LINES. AT THE PRESENT TIME WE CAN SAY THAT MPLA CONTROL

BEGINS AT A POINT SOUTH OF CAXITO, RUNS NORTHEASTWARD TO A POINT AT THE SAME LATITUDE AS ALDEIA VICOSA, THEN EASTWARD THROUGH ALDEIA VICOSA TO A POINT SEVERAL KILOMETERS WEST OF CAMABATELA, THEN SOUTH TO LUCALA, EAST NORTHEAST TO DUQUE DE BRAGANCA, SOUTHEAST TO MALANJE AND THEN EAST NORTHEAST. MPLA APPEARS TO BE IN CONTROL OF THE ENTIRE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF ANGOLA. THE PORTUGUESE BELIEVE THAT MPLA STRATEGY IS TO SECURE THE EAST IN ORDER TO ENSURE ACCESS TO ARMS STOCKPILES IN ZAMBIA, AS WELL AS TO SEAL OFF THE BORDERS AND CONTROL THE VITAL BWGUELA RAILROAD.

10. UNITA IS IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. IT HAS FEW ARMS AND ITS POLICY OF REMAINING ABOVE THE BATTLE IS NO LONGER TENABLE. UNITA PRESIDENT JONAS SAVIMBI RECOGNIZED THIS WHEN, ON AUGUST 4 HE ANNOUNCED THAT UNITA WOULD CARVE OUT ITS OWN ZONES OF INFLUENCE. HE HAS LOST A GREAT DEAL OF PRESTIGE AND RESPECT BY NOT RESPONDING TO MPLA MASSACRES OF HIS TROOPS. DESPITE HIS PROFESSED IMPARTIALITY AND ALOOFNESS FROM THE MPLA-FNLA BATTLES, HE AND ALL HIS LIEUTENANTS DETEST THE MPLA. STILL, SAVIMBI IS A TRIMMER AND DREADS COMING OUT ON THE LOSING SIDE. EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE MPLA SLAUGHTERS OF HIS FORCES HE DID NOT MENTION THE MPLA BY NAME IN THE COMMUNIQUE IN WHICH HE CASTIGATED IT AND VIRTUALLY ANNOUNCED A STATE OF WAR. HE HAS NOT FORMALLY SIDED WITH THE FNLA BECAUSE HE DOES NOT WANT TO CLOSE THE DOOR TO POSSIBLE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MPLA. IF UNITA LEADERSHIP HATES THE MPLA, IT IS DISMAYED AT THE LOW LEVEL OF COMPETENCE AND FIGHTING ABILITY SHOWN BY FNLA. A UNITA OFFICIAL TOLD ME THAT DURING THE RECENT FIGHTING IN LUSO UNITA AND FNLA AGREED JOINTLY TO RESIST THE MPLA. BEFORE LONG THE FNLA HAD FLED AND UNITA WAS LEFT TO CARRY ON THE BATTLE ALONE.

11. I WILL FOLLOW UP SHORTLY WITH A CABLE GIVING SOME BACKGROUND AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION.

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PAGE 03 LUANDA 01086 02 OF 02 090855Z

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